

Here Comes The Bride

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[0:00] My two oldest girls have reached a point in their life where they're starting to show interest in shows like Say Yes to the Dress. And I'm not very excited about that.

Already at 14 and three quarters and 11, they're beginning to imagine what it will be like to don. That beautiful dress and to walk down that aisle towards some bum who waits them at the other end. A few weeks ago, I walked upstairs and they're all in there laughing and having fun. And I walk in and Ashlyn has found Julie's wedding dress and is trying it on her house. It's been more than 17 years since Julie put that dress on.

I remember it like it was this morning. I should have showed you a picture, but I didn't want her to get mad at me. There's something about the beauty of a bride on her wedding day.

[1:14] The significance of that moment and the meaning of it all. Even if we don't quite comprehend it the way that we should comprehend it in terms of what the Bible teaches about it, there's still something about it, something built into it that captures our attention and our affections.

Time and time again, we see the most stoic and masculine of men reduced to tears in a moment as they look on their bride.

In that moment, it's as if he sees her glory for the first time and is overwhelmed at the gift that she is to his life.

A companion designed especially for him. And that's what's happening in this text. Genesis 2, look with me at verse 18.

Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.

[2:28] Now out of the ground, the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of the heavens, to every beast of the field.

But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.

And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

[3:36] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. And they shall become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

In chapter 1, the essential equality and distinction of male and female was noted for us. But it didn't explain that distinction or its purpose.

In chapter 2, however, as we're working through it, our understanding of the two human sexes of God's divine binary for humanity, we're beginning to understand them better.

We're beginning to see better how they relate to one another. And that's starting to take shape for us here in the scriptures. Begin to see here God's plan for how humans will fulfill the creation mandate to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth.

We're seeing how the family will be the foundational unit for human flourishing in the world that God has created. So much about human sexuality and marriage is distorted in our day and age.

[4:59] But the truth is it's been distorted ever since the first sin, which we'll get to next week in Genesis chapter 3. But in this text, before that, we see the glory of what God intended for the man and the woman.

Last week we looked especially at the first man and his role as a prophet and priest and king in God's garden. And now we find the glory of the first woman specially created to complement the man so that they might glorify God together as his image bearers in the world.

And when we take the two sections together and we begin to process them as a unit, that what we find is that God's very good design for human flourishing is the covenantal union of a man and a woman who are equal in dignity while gloriously distinct in personhood and in function or purpose. God's evaluation of his creation is suddenly and quite emphatically different from everything else we've seen in Genesis so far.

If you think back to Genesis 1 over and over and over again, we see God's creative act and then we see the evaluation that it is good. And we get to the end of it, to the end of day 6, and we see that it is all very good.

[7:09] But here we're seeing the expansion of what was taking place on day 6. This is before the conclusion of the day. And strikingly, coming off the page, we see this evaluation from God.

Something is not good for the very first time. It's shocking in the text, provocative almost. But in what way is the something not good?

It's not that God had made a mistake or that there was a problem that had suddenly occurred to him and needed addressing. Something was not good in the sense that it was incomplete.

It was insufficient in its current state. And God interjects into the narrative a statement to help us understand the critical nature of what he was about to do.

Something was missing. And we, along with Adam, need to sense the inadequacy of man's state prior to God's next creative act.

[8:22] Do you get that? You need to sense that before we go anywhere else with this text. There is inadequacy in Adam. Insufficiency in Adam.

God wants for us to see it, so he interjects this statement. And he shows us, as he shows Adam, this inadequacy so that we might fully understand and appreciate the glory of what he's about to do. And what is this problem that he calls our attention to? The problem is that the man is alone. He's alone.

God here indicating for us that man cannot flourish in isolation. He designed humanity to exist in community.

First, in communion with the Lord God, his creator, and then with other human beings. And we can discern from this that a life that is lived in isolation from communion with the Lord and then from communion with other people is categorically not good.

[9:33] It's not good. It's not good. And still, the text is primarily about a specific kind of companionship.

A relationship that will feature in the scriptures as a key building block and foundational stone for human life and human flourishing.

But an important note of clarity needs to be made here before we go any further. While this text is indeed focused on marriage, we're going to spend a lot of time this morning thinking about that and meditating on it.

We are not to use this text as an instrument to castigate or think less of singleness. That's not what this text is doing.

How could we disparage and demean a life that characterized the Lord Jesus in his own life?

[10:41] That Paul said may actually be preferred in some cases. The New Testament calls singleness a gift.

One of the things we need to stop doing is assuming that every person needs a spouse before their life is worth anything. We have got to stop looking at every single person in our lives that may come in and out of our church as if their main need from us is that we fix them up.

That's not what this text is doing. And so if you're here today and you're single, which is a lot of people, and hopefully at least for those two girls I mentioned earlier in the sermon will be the case for a very long time.

This text is not about making you feel less than what you are. It's not what this is.

But there is a significance to the text. And we need to understand it. We need to understand it well. What God said that man lacked was specifically a helper fit for him.

[11:56] And I want you to see the way that the scene unfolds here. It indicates that Adam himself was unaware of the inadequacy. Just look again at the text, verse 19.

Immediately after making this evaluation, God's now out of the ground. It says the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heaven and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. Now I want you to think about that. Okay, this isn't a flippant thing. This wouldn't happen in 10 minutes, right? Adam will have to be carefully examining these creatures.

It's not that they come before him and he just pulls a name out of his head. You know, that will be an aardvark. I think I'll call you an aardvark. No, we must understand that what is happening with Adam is a close examination so that he might rationally and reasonably look at the creature and then associate a name with the creature based on what he understands about it.

Okay? God's bringing all these animals before him and he is giving them a name. And then verse 20. The man gave the names to all the livestock and the birds and the beast.

[13:09] But for Adam, for the man. There was not found a helper fit for him. At this point, Adam didn't know what he didn't know. Which is another reminder that God is the source of all wisdom.

We must look to him and to his word to truly understand who we are and what we need. God is revealing that to Adam.

It almost seems like a disruption in the text, doesn't it? God says, this is not good. He needs a helper. So I think I'm going to show him all the animals. It almost seems like a disruption, but it's very purposeful.

God is showing Adam what he needs by showing him that nothing else in this creation can fit that need. He was to examine them and name them.

And when he finished his task, God had made the man aware that among all of creation, not a single living creature was fit for him. He was alone.

[14:13] Unable to be and to do all that God made him to be and to do.

It would be impossible for him to fully image, as the covenant head in humanity, to fully image his creator alone. It would be impossible for him to fulfill the creation mandate alone.

And God shows him all the creatures so that he might sense the weight of that inadequacy. Let's think for a moment here about this term.

It's an important one. It's a helper fit for him. Tremendously debated and discussed. Even saw last night, I think, the phone is reading my sermon documents.

So I was getting these ads for Christianity Today articles about what it means to be a helper fit for him. And just out of curiosity, I wanted to look at a few comments just to see, okay, what are people saying?

[15:23] And immediately I regretted it. What is this? Well, helper is not being used here in the same way that we would think of our toddlers and say, what a good little helper for mommy you are.

That's not what this term means. This isn't an inferior individual in a position of servitude. It's not what this is.

The terms used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe God as a helper to his people. Process that for a moment. God is not your servant.

But he is your helper. And how does he help us? In our weakness and failure and inadequacy, he makes up for what we lack in order that he might save and bless his people.

And in this text, man lacks a helper, not in the sense of a servant, but as one who can fill in what he lacks so that they both might flourish in God's garden.

[16:38] The term's a little clunky in English, isn't it? According to, if we take it directly into English in a literal and wooden way, many scholars would say a literal wooden understanding of this phrase is that man is in need of someone who is like opposite of him.

Like opposite of him. In other words, Adam needs someone who is like him and yet different from him.

The same as him yet distinct from him. Equal to him and yet unique in personhood and in purpose. What Adam was missing was a human counterpart. He was missing someone equal to him in nature, equal to him in dignity, but distinct from him so as to supply what he lacked on his own. That's the helper fit for him. Think of it like a set of double doors on the front of a house. The two doors there share the same nature.

[18:00] They're both doors. They ultimately share the same purpose and that is to keep some things in the house and to keep other things out of the house.

And yet they stand opposite to one another. Equal yet opposite. Distinctly designed so that each needs the other to fulfill the purpose that they share.

Adam lacked a complementary counterpart with which to fulfill a shared purpose. The glory of God and the flourishing of human life.

Missing counterpart. I want you to notice secondly, a divine provision. Divine provision. A solution that God provides.

Verse 21. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs, closed up its place with flesh.

[19:15] Notice the key distinction. God hasn't created anything else like this, has he? This is unique. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made that rib into a woman.

And brought her to the man. I love this so much. God provided the solution to man's missing counterpart through his creative power and purpose.

Takes a rib from Adam's side and he makes it into a woman. And I love the flow of this narrative in verse 26. The Lord God himself takes the role of father of the bride.

Who brings the woman to the man. Just as he had paraded the animals of the garden one by one before Adam.

Once Adam has seen what he lacks. That there is nothing for him as a helper fit for him. Now God at the very end parades to him and presents to him a woman.

[20:29] A special creation that will be a helper fit for him. And God presents the woman to the man as his very good gift.

And we see that woman is God's solution for Adam. There's some important takeaways that we need to consider. First, we must affirm the essential equality of men and women in God's design.

The essential that is in her essence and nature equal to the man.

Of course the groundwork for this is laid for us in chapter 1. Just turn your eyes back to chapter 1 verse 27. So God created man. That's a general reference to humanity as a whole.

God created humanity in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. The groundwork is laid for us there.

[21:41] We saw the fundamental truth that all of humanity. Not just the first man. But all of humanity is made in the image of God. And equally shares the dignity of that special status in God's creation.

It is not unique to the male. It is equally shared male and female. And here we see that foundation being built upon.

In the way that God created the woman. Adam was formed from the dust. Eve was made from Adam.

Why does that matter? Well for a few reasons. One, it matters in the sense that Eve was in Adam. Like we are in Adam as the covenant head of the human race.

It's important. There's not two covenant heads here. There's one covenant head in Adam. Eve comes from him. That's essential for us to understand.

[22:49] But it also means that she was made of the same stuff as him. She is like him.

She shares a nature with him. And what's the deal with this rib? So weird. Is it though?

She is equal to him. Famously, the Puritan Matthew Henry wrote, Eve was not made out of his head to top him.

Not out of his feet to be trampled on by him. But out of his side to be equal with him. Under his arm to be protected.

Near his heart to be loved. Who knew Puritans could be so romantic? We must affirm the essential equality of the woman.

[24:02] We must also affirm the necessity of distinction between male and female in God's design. God designed the woman as an equal counterpart to the man.

Meaning she must be like him. Yet she must also be distinct from him. And how is it that she is distinct from him? Well, of course she's distinct biologically.

So that the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth might actually be fulfilled.

Can't do that with another man. She's also distinct in what I'm calling just basic constitution.

Which is to say that her intuitions and her gifts are unique to God's design for womanhood in the flourishing of human life.

Another way to say it is Jared would make a terrible mother. And Julie would be a terrible father. Not because there's something less or greater in either one of us.

[25 : 13] But there's something unique in the basic constitution with which God has created us to fulfill the purpose and function that he has assigned to us.

She's also unique in function. This is where people get hung up, isn't it? We shouldn't get hung up on this. She is unique in function. She's filling a role that is distinct from the man's.

She was not created to be a prophet, priest, and king like Adam. The garden already has one of those.

Doesn't need another one. She can't be a helper fit for Adam to glorify God with a shared purpose if her function is the same.

Doesn't work. She was to live alongside of him. Alongside of him as a recipient of God's blessings through the high calling of the prophet, priest, and king of the garden.

[26 : 22] No distinction in humanities then meant to diminish or magnify an individual's dignity before God. That's not what the distinction is there for.

No part of humanity, whether it be the difference in male and female, whether it be the difference in old or young, whether it be the difference in ethnicity and culture, doesn't matter. No part of humanity is intrinsically superior to or inferior to any other part of humanity.

Everything that we affirm about the distinction of the sexes must rest on the foundation of man and woman's essential equality of dignity before God.

Man's function as prophet, priest, and king does not make him greater than the woman. Each stands equal before God.

Each is assigned a unique and necessary function in God's design for our good. Take one away and we fail.

[27 : 38] Try to cross them over and it won't work. Make them ambiguous. It won't work. This is God's design.

It's for our good. And before we move on, if I can just say to every woman, girl in this room, whether you're a wife or whether you're in middle school, high school or single, whatever, you are inferior to no one.

That's not me as a girl, dad, wanting to build up the little girls in our room. That's God's word. You have an equal share in dignity because you are made in the image of God.

You have an equal share in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. As Paul tells us in Galatians 3, in Christ, there is no male and female.

We are one in Christ. But I want to also say, your femaleness is a gift.

[29 : 03] It is a gift from God that is to be honored. It is a gift from God to be cherished. It is a gift from God to be celebrated, not just by your husband, not just by your culture, by you.

You need to own it. It is a gift. And you need to glorify God with it. Indeed, as we understand Genesis 1 and 2 coming together in one unit, what is it that we find?

Womanhood is a glorious work of God, apart from which God cannot evaluate it as very good. It can't be very good without her.

It can't be very good without you. And you need to know that. And you need to love it and cherish it and honor it in the way that you glorify God with your life. Third, we see a sacred union.

There's a missing counterpart. Okay? Something's wrong. Needs to be fixed. There's a divine provision. God provides the solution, which is perfect and glorious in more ways than we can probably even discern.

[30 : 09] But there's more. There's a sacred union here, isn't there? Look at verse 22 or 23, excuse me. Then the man said, this at last, at last.

This bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. And he evaluates her with all the curiosity and examination that he had done with each animal that God had brought before him.

And he gets to the conclusion of his evaluation. And he says, she must be called woman. She simply means out of man. She's like me.

She's for me. We'll call her woman. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and old fast to his wife. And they shall become one flesh.

Life was not good for the man, so God provides a perfect solution in a woman. But one final step is necessary.

[31:14] God brings the two into a sacred and covenantal union that has shaped human life ever since. Notice Adam's response here.

It's exuberant. It's joyful. It jumps off the page. At last, one who is like me. The same authority and careful consideration that he's already demonstrated.

He names her woman. He immediately recognizes her glory and her purpose. She was like him, and yet she was distinct from him.

And she was for him. Not as a possession. But as a partner. His reaction jumps off the page.

It's an expression of serious delight. Men, you need to see this. It was truly love at first sight.

[32:20] It was truly love at first sight. A love that's not only felt by the man, but demonstrated in the way that he understands her, in the way that he speaks of her, in the way that he embraces her, in the way that he delights in her.

Here is a man who understood the glory of his wife and her presence and purpose overwhelmed him with joy.

A lesson for every man in this room that has an ear to hear. Some of us need this text.

We need it to remind us of our own inadequacy so that we might rejoice in our wives anew. When's the last time you looked at your wife with this kind of joy for who she is and who God created her to be for you, not as an inferior, not as a possession, but as a partner in glorifying and imaging God? When's the last time you were so joyfully exuberant in your wife that you told somebody else how wonderful she is?

[33:52] That you embraced her and delighted in her rather than being annoyed by her or complaining about her? The final two verses apply then how the man and the woman relate to one another in covenantal union.

The first marriage. What's the nature of God's design in this marriage? First marriage requires a suitable counterpart so that we understand the union of male and female to be essential in God's plan.

In other words, any other attempts at a marital union that is not a man and a woman, a male and a female, are perversions of God's good design.

We also see marriage requires a realignment of relational priorities.

Notice what Moses as narrator gives to us in verse 24. Therefore, therefore, because of all of this, Moses says, a man must leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

[35:28] That the man is to leave his father and mother, it doesn't mean abandoning your family. That's not what this means. In one sense, it means grow up. But in a much deeper sense, in a much more significant sense, it means to realign your relational priorities so that your wife becomes your highest priority.

She then becomes your most treasured relationship. Not to the diminishment of your mom for you mama's boys, but to the glory of her, her role in your life.

A faithful and joyful marriage that glorifies God is marked by this relational realignment, the two prioritizing each other over parents, over friendships, over children.

Your kids are not the most important relationship you have if you're married. It's not. And I have \$3 and I love them.

But one day, they won't be mine anymore. Do you know who will always be mine? Her. Always. She is my priority above every other relationship.

[37:16] If you look at divorce rates and reasons for it, this is a big issue. Some can't leave their parents so they don't prioritize their husband or their wife and it ends in divorce.

Some, it's not about their parents. It's just about clinging to this life that was theirs before they got married and they want so much to hold on to all these other relationships, friendships or coworkers, whatever it is that they neglect to prioritize their husband and their wife in the way that they should. It ruins their marriage. For many, it's the kids. Divorce statistics tell us that the age for divorce is middle age and higher.

Why? The kids are finally gone. And here's two people that for 20 or 25 years have prioritized the kids over their own relationship and they get to the end of it.

The thing that they really love has left and they look at the other and say, I don't want this anymore. I'm done. That is not God's design. But the most significant part of this covenantal union here is this two becoming one.

[38:44] One flesh, he says. 24. A man shall leave his father and his mother. He shall hold fast to his wife. The onus on that, men, is you. But then the two become one flesh.

On the most basic level, this refers to the physical sexual union between a man and a woman in covenant marriage.

It's not less than that. It's more than that. It's not less than that. It grounds our understanding of how and with whom sex is to be enjoyed.

But this one flesh union is about far more than physical sexual intimacy. It is a spiritual fusion wherein the two become one.

It's a deep communion between a man and a woman that images the plurality of unity that exists in the triune God.

[39:47] It's a spiritual union. It's something that happens that's beyond your control because God designed it to function and to happen in a particular way.

It's not a relationship that can be entered into and exited on a whim. It's a sacred covenant with such significance that it's on the basis of this very verse that Jesus would later declare what God has joined together.

Do not let man separate. This union is a covenantal union. It is bigger than you seeing someone that you're attracted to and saying, I choose her or I choose him.

It's bigger than that. This is something that God does. Jesus says what God has joined together in this marriage. These two individuals are not to separate.

It matters. It's bigger than you think it is. I think most marriages struggle because they fail to recognize this. They fail to understand and acknowledge it. Too many of us are attempting to maintain an individual identity, an individual autonomy from our spouse, which is not at all what God intended.

[41:11] I like how Andrew Peterson says it in his song, Dancing in the Minefields. He says, I do are the two most famous last words, the beginning of the end.

Do you understand what he means? Last words. You say I do, you make the covenant and you die. But to lose yourself for another I've heard, he writes, is a good place to begin.

So good. So good. When you join together with your spouse, you died. But you receive something far greater.

Two becomes one in a way that you will never experience with another person. But is there a greater goal to this? What is the telos of all of this?

Ultimately, it all points to Jesus. The greater Adam. In Ephesians 5, Paul wrote that the one flesh union of marriage symbolizes for us, it points for us to the union of Christ and his bride, the church.

[42:38] And he quotes this verse and then he says, this mystery is profound and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

How, Paul? Jesus loves his bride so much that he gave his very life for her. He died.

He went to the cross to pay for her sins. Not so that he could tell everybody else how great her sins are and how annoying that is to him and how he wished she was better than what she is.

He goes to the cross and he pays for her sins in order that she might be forgiven and she might be sanctified and he might present her then not as blemished and scarred and broken but as whole and as holy and as blameless on account of his righteousness.

That's what this is about. we are living parables of the goodness of God in the person of Christ and some of us are telling awful lies about Jesus in the way that we're approaching our marriage.

[44:07] Jesus loves his bride as his own flesh Paul says for just as Adam was united to Eve in this union those who believe are brought into a spiritual union with him that cannot be broken and will not be broken and it is in this way by looking at the example of Christ husbands are to love their wives and wives are to love their husbands.

marriage then in God's design is a gospel shaped union that displays the glory of Jesus and his bride to the world.

Now in our culture of course and perhaps even in some of our homes I don't know maybe you'll talk about this on your way home today. there is an obvious tension surrounding the issues of sexuality and marriage we understand that we know it's true.

We need to acknowledge that the tension that we feel in this is not the result of a flaw in God's design it's actually born of man's fallen nature and sin.

The tension you feel in resisting this presentation the Bible's presentation of human sexuality and of marriage is not because it's actually a problem it's because you are a problem and I'm a problem we're sinners since the fall this essential equality and dignity between men and women has been diminished by both hate-filled misogyny which is getting rampant among Christians at the moment but it's the same with radical feminism both are diminishing the essential equality of dignity that exists within humanity human sexuality of course has been perverted in the most extreme ways that which God designed to be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage continues to be defiled in unimaginable ways within marriage we'll see this again in chapter three but within marriage husbands and wives seek to dominate each other for their own personal gain

[46:56] God shows us a better way here he shows us the good and righteous way so that in his design male and female share an essential dignity that bears his image but they're also designed gloriously distinct from one another in personhood and in purpose and God gifts them uniquely he assigns them a function that when properly served makes them wonderfully complimentary counterparts the man husband is to function as a prophet priest and king in his home exercising authority so that he might love and serve his wife not dominate her the woman has been the perfect counterpart standing alongside her husband to complete what he lacks and receive

God's blessings through him and rather than attempting to dominate the other God designed us to recognize and value the significance of the other and then to use our distinct gifts and our unique function to love and serve the other for their good so that we might lead for her good men so that we might help for his good ladies and this is all in God's design and no one should care about it more and be more convictionally sincere about it than Christians not only do we recognize God's ways as key to human flourishing but when we live in according to God's design we display the glory of the gospel of Jesus and his love for his people and no marriage achieves this perfectly I don't want you to get the wrong idea you're going to fail again and again and again at this we're sinners prone to fall into the same ditches that Adam and Eve fell in and yet each of us is to pursue this we're to continue to persist in it and pursue it in love in faith in repentance towards one another and forgiveness and we do all of that trusting that Christ has paid for every failure for his bride already you will fail but in him you are holy and righteous and forgiven and by his grace we will learn to love and to serve one another as God intended let's pray may may